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ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

A Project of the Federation of Alberta Naturalists

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STRATEGY '91—A SUCCESS!

A collective sigh of relief has passed through the atlas office. The fifth and final year of data collection has been completed and what a summer it was!

Thanks to the organizational genius of our past Executive Director, a number of programs were created in the 1991 Strategy document aimed at completing provincial coverage. Ready and waiting by May 1, these programs all showed tremendous success over the summer.

Blockbusters kicked off the season by heading out to every corner of the province, flushing out those hard-to-access species as they went. Remote areas participants followed shortly thereafter, heading north to atlas 16 of the most remote, mosquito-infested, and sometimes very wet areas of northern Alberta. Back on the home front, Regional Coordinators, dedicated volunteers, and seconded employees, made a special effort to complete their own squares, and to help out with neighbouring squares and regions. **Bravo, everybody!**

Your efforts, along with the many contributors of the Existing Sources of Data campaign, have moved the project from 62% to 91% completion of original goals. (This figure does not include the data from 7 regions still outstanding - a good reason to get your data cards in!)

As Project Manager, I can now safely say we have achieved satisfactory comprehensive provincial coverage and are now able to move on to the publication phase of the project. None of this would have been possible without the tremendous spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm emanating from around the province for the atlas project this year. Along with our regular supporters and volunteers, who have had the patience and goodwill to bear with us these past five years, we also had a number of new agencies and individuals helping to make 1991 a landmark year.

Although there isn't room on this page to thank everyone involved in the '91 strategy (I'll leave their names for the atlas publication), I am tremendously indebted to the following:

- To Canada Employment and Immigration who made the hiring of our blockbusters possible, as well as to our 12 blockbusters who accepted the challenge with spirit and determination (and good rain gear!).
- To Forestry, Lands and Wildlife for their tremendous response to our request for logistical support. Many thanks to the large number of staff from the Alberta Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Division, and Forest Fire Lookouts who either assisted Atlassers, or who conducted their own atlasing.
- To the staff of Wood Buffalo National Park who assisted remote area Atlassers.
- The James L. Baillie Memorial Fund who funded a large portion of the Remote Areas Program, as well as the 26 volunteers who took part in this program.

I could go on and on and on... but for now, thank you everyone, it's been a fun year! ❑ — *Petra Stubbs*

ABAP CASINO $$

Circle on your calendar the date of December 2 – 3, when FAN will be holding their casino to help raise funds for atlas publication.

Whether you want to volunteer to help out, or you're just interested in rolling a few dice yourself, give FAN a call for more details (453-8629). ❑

PUBLICATIONS UPDATE

Just what is happening with the publications phase, you may well ask?

Well, back here at the office we are scurrying to complete data collection and verification (long hours staring at the computer) as well as compiling rare bird reports for the Rare Bird Committee. Hence we deeply appreciated your efforts to get these materials to us!

Meanwhile our new editor, Glen Semenchuk, is hard at work developing a 10 species mock-up to be presented at the Fall RC's meeting.

Glen will be receiving help from a "Section 25" Canada Employment grant which will enable him to hire three people to research and input information onto a new computer.

With the development of data into maps, researched information into species accounts, and the selection of pictures to accompany write-ups, the book should come together, right? ❑

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

A FEW WORDS FROM OUR EDITOR...

By accepting the position of Editor for the Bird Atlas, I guess I have signalled the turn into the home stretch for this project (Ya-Hooo!). The end may be in sight but it is going to be a challenging period of time. In order to meet the publication date set by the management committee (September 1992), we are all going to have to deal with some tough deadlines. I know you will all rise to the challenge and as always, office staff are willing and able to help out wherever possible. I look forward to meeting all the RC's at the fall meeting to outline plans and schedules for the final publication. ❑

— Glen Semenchuk

PHOTO REQUEST

Species photographs are often a quick measure of the quality of most natural history and wildlife books. For the Atlas we have come up with a representative slide for most of the species, but we still need slides of the following:

Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
American White Pelican
Black-crowned Night-heron
White-faced Ibis
Green-winged Teal
Mallard
American Black Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Redhead
Harlequin Duck
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Barrow's Goldeneye
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Bald Eagle
Golden Eagle
Spruce Grouse
White-tailed Ptarmigan
Sage Grouse
Greater Prairie-Chicken
Yellow Rail
Virginia Rail
American Coot
Mountain Plover
Caspian Tern
Rock Dove
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Purple Martin
Clark's Nutcracker
Black-billed Magpie
American Crow
Common Raven
Black-capped Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Rock Wren
Sedge Wren
Townsend's Solitaire
Hermit Thrush
Sprague's Pipit
Palm Warbler
Rosy Finch
Cassin's Finch

The public is invited to submit slides, for these species, for possible inclusion in the Atlas. If used, these photographs would be a lasting, visible contribution.

The public is also invited to review those slides that have already been judged as acceptable for publication and see if they can out-do them. They will be on display at the Bird Atlas publication office in the Percy Page building (11759 Groat Road) in Edmonton by mid-October.

Please contact Glen Semenchuk or Leland Ferguson at 453-8629 or 453-9188 if you want to contribute slides or have questions about the above requests. ❑

ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS DAY

ABA Day was a low key event in Edmonton this year. A small gathering at the John Janzen Nature Centre listened to Bruce McGillivray sum up the project's progress to date and to Bill Hall speaking on behalf of the Minister of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife, Leroy Fjordbotten. A nature walk, led by Gerry Lunn, was enjoyed by all with nary a drop of rain all morning! ❑

THE ALBERTA BIRD ATLAS COMPUTER SYSTEM AND ITS DATABASES

Sounds like a dry topic, doesn't it. To us at Fish and Wildlife this is a unique and priceless endeavour. Unique because of the species information and data portability; priceless because of the potential benefit to the management of wildlife. Let me describe the system and how it's used for the project.

The Alberta Bird Atlas (ABA) System was created to maximize flexibility and access to ABA information gathered during the Atlas project. The ABA system stores all Atlasser information for the production of the ABA atlas as well as providing reports and maps to fulfill requirements of the projects yearly planning cycle.

All computer hardware and software was purchased specifically to fulfill the needs of the this project. The Fish and Wildlife Division and Land Information Services Division in the Department of Forestry, Lands and Wildlife have made a significant commitment to the project by undertaking all the systems development and maintenance costs, as well as all data entry costs.

The ABA computer system which is housed at the Fish and Wildlife Division's head office in the Bramalea Building (six blocks away from Arrow's nest) consists of:

- Compaq 386-20 with a 100 mb hard drive disk, VGA graphics and math co-processor (computer hardware)
- Hewlett Packard LaserJet printer (hardware)
- dBase IV (database software)
- MapInfo (mapping software)
- Microsoft Excel (spreadsheet software)
- PC-Tools (utilities software)

The Alberta Bird Atlas Database System, which was put together by the ABA systems analyst Erik A. Ellehoj, is comprised of a number of databases and programs written in the xBase language, using dBase IV. Twelve databases of information are used in order

to maintain a minimum level of redundancy in the database. These databases share common fields with other databases in order to link the information using a relational database structure.

All programs and databases were created specifically to suit the needs of the project. At present the system consists of 60 individual programs, which can be called using a system of nesting menus. The user is presented with all available options in an opening menu. As the user chooses further options, more menus appear on the screen until the last menu option has been chosen, and the specified option calls a program. Programs were written to fulfill four major tasks: data entry, data editing, report production and map production.

The ABA programs for data entry, editing, reporting and mapping consist of over 3,000 lines of instructions (programming code). These programs have been used to enter the 4,120 Atlasser cards with over 87,460 sightings of the 340 odd bird species. This does not include the number of records in the Atlasser information databases. By projects end it is anticipated that over 100,000 sightings will have been stored in the database.

These programs will not permit the operator to enter sightings for a card whose serial number has not already been registered in the appropriate database. The system will also not tolerate improper species codes, breeding abundance codes, incorrect Atlasser codes, etc. However, there is no way to prevent the user from entering an incorrect (but acceptable) code such as NE instead of NY. Because of this, after the data from several cards has been entered, the operator checks all database entries against the entries in the cards to ensure data integrity and performs any required editing function. Report programs that produce progress reports are required to properly manage the ABA project. These reports provide coordinators with information to make sure proper provincial coverage is maintained by indicating blocks and squares needing additional Atlasser effort along with information in relation to bird species abundance and distribution. The mapping programs provide visual reference of bird species abundance and Atlasser effort distribution. The ABA maps that appeared in the summer 1991 ABA newsletter were from this mapping system.

The data entry process for each Atlasser card takes approximately six minutes. Shirley Trott of the Fish and Wildlife Division has spent upwards of 370 hours entering Atlasser data into the ABA system. Each time there is a major data entry of 400 – 500 cards, the ABA system must be re-indexed so that all new entries are sorted properly to produce the up-to-date reports and maps. The dedicated Compaq 386 computer runs constantly (by itself) for approximately 140 hours to complete this re-indexing process. This processing time will increase as more information is entered into the ABA database system. Each individual species map takes us an average of 20 minutes to produce. Map production for all the species Atlassed during the project takes 22 days (Compaq 386 running 8 hours per day).

The Alberta Bird Atlas Database is part and parcel of a pretty impressive project, wouldn't you say? ❑

EXCERPTS FROM REMOTE AREA REPORTS

Diary of Bird Atlasing at Petitot Tower

JULY 10 — Today two guys from Florida arrived at Rainbow Lake to see how many breeding birds they can find in the wilds of Bootis Hill as guests of Alberta Forest Service. They are part of the remote areas atlasing effort of the Alberta Bird Atlas Project sponsored by the Alberta Federation of Naturalists. Steve Blanton at the Rainbow Lake AFS office and Petra Stubbs from Alberta Provincial Museum have already made arrangements, so after a last supper at the hotel in Rainbow Lake we were helicoptered to Petitot Tower. We were cordially greeted here by John Richardson and 10,000 mosquitoes.

Our job is to complete the fine five year bird observation work of John in a 10 x 10 km square of remote forest; a 1% sample of 100 x 100 km block in the northern part of the province. Our first discovery was that Petitot Tower is one kilometre north of where we thought it was – usually a small detail, but in this case it is just outside of the 100 x 100 km block we are supposed to sample. There is only one thing to do – work with John on his square **and** walk south and develop from scratch a list of breeding species in the square south of here. Easier said than done, because it means 2 hours of rough walking each day in addition to the walking required to survey a 6 x 6 mile square of mixed forest and muskeg. John gave us an orientation from *upstairs* (from the tower) of the routes we should take. ❑

— Ric West, Ron Christen

Bird Atlas Survey at the Remote Areas of Margaret and Eva Lakes, Northern Alberta, 4 – 9 July

I am pleased to inform you that I have completed a relatively comprehensive bird survey in squares 3, 83, and 93 – zones 11U and 12U – blocks NR and PR.

Considering the restrictive terrain of this region, survey concentration was relegated to accessible areas only; for example large sections of lake and stream shoreline, navigable creeks, walking trails (including four miles of connecting foot trail between Margaret and Eva Lakes), workable cut-line clearings, and the three large islands centred in Eva. While positively identifying 60 species, the major concentrations of warblers and songsters were at island NRS 2 and three in Eva Lake. A virtual paradise of birch stands, willow, and mature spruce made up the island habitat. Surveying proved to be the most favourable times as 90% of the birds spotted were assessed to be confirmed nesters, usually carrying food. This area is a must for future consideration of study if possible. Assisted by Chuck Whipple of Grande Prairie, I was able to sample other territories from the Pon Ton River in square 83 to shoreline and major clearings in the east section of square 3. I am delighted to report a healthy population of nesting bald eagles with young as well as three families of nested osprey, all in separate

stages of flight training. Occupied eagle nests at both the mouth of the Pon Ton river and on islands 2 and 3 on lake Eva were confirmed and re-confirmed. Most of the sparrow sightings were in cleared areas – trails, clear cuts, and particularly along the edges of the mile long air strip at the provincial forestry camp and lodge proper. My personal opinion is that this man-made clearing has created a mini-ecosystem in itself, attracting the numerous sparrows (practically all species) plus the only sighting of killdeer and common snipe. The buildings on the strip and at the lodge have provided nesting sites for the only colony of barn swallows observed.

Marmot, silver fox, weasel, and caribou were also observed and studied on or along the strip. ❑

— John Klem

Remote Area Fieldtrips Participant Comments

Wood Buffalo National Park & area

"Everything went fine, but lots of rain. Actually switched a few squares due to accessibility. Puzzled at how quiet a few stands were. Lots of skitters. Great cooperation from George Mercer and crowd. They will be mailing in their report and want to receive newsletters."

— Herbert & Yvonne Blades
Delaware

Rainbow Lake & Bistcho Lake

"My wife and I had an excellent trip to Rainbow and Bistcho Lake. Forestry personnel were very supportive and helpful. We saw quite a few species (90 all told) but there were quite a few I had expected to see but didn't. The **best** sighting was a pair of Trumpeter swans with five cygnets on the west end of Bistcho Lake, near the Petitot river outflow. These were spotted by helicopter. All in all, an excellent trip, the only thing I don't miss are those wretched mosquitoes!"

— Mr. & Mrs. Phil Henderson
Vancouver

Red Earth to Waddin Lake, Northern Alberta (300 km North of Lesser Slave Lake), 10 – 20 June 1991

June 10 I departed Cross Lake Provincial Park at 08:30. I headed north, arriving in my squares and set up camp. I birded some dugouts and areas along the road until 8:00 that evening. It began raining at midnight and continued until 7:00 AM.

June 11 I birded a gravel pit and the Loon River Air Base area in the morning and in the afternoon a couple of hours were spent birding on the Wabasca River. It was an overcast evening and it began to rain at 1:00 PM and continued until 1:30 AM on June 12.

June 12 Beginning at 5:30 in the morning with breakfast, I slopped through flooded cutlines and bog areas. Eventually I had to turn back due to the difficult travelling condition. Meanwhile it continued to rain until late afternoon. My tent site is almost in standing water, but the tent is still dry!

June 14 It's still raining and although I would have liked to move to the Senex Creek Campground, I could not get the car onto the road so I walked 2 km to the Sawmill for help. There was a record rainfall this week in Red Earth and the weather is still not clearing. Birding highlights are two northern three toed woodpecker nests. One is in an aspen and the other in a small black spruce.

June 15 I reached Senex Creek Recreational Area. With light showers in the night, drizzling in the morning, heavy showers at 10:30 AM that continued every hour, birding was never too far from the car. Most abundant here is the flicker but I sighted a horned grebe on a nest, young goldeneye, and greater yellowlegs. I also heard fox sparrow, marsh wrens, mourning warbler and northern waterthrush. Now the river is really beginning to rise.

June 16 It finally started to clear up in the afternoon. I saw 24 common mergansers swimming in a line, and at about 3:00 PM a bald eagle was soaring high up against the incoming storm front. This certainly lifted my spirits. But the river continues to rise.

June 17 I headed out to bird in NP 96 amidst light rain showers. Birding was poor. I spotted a northern harrier hunting over the marsh and eventually caught a look at a short-tailed weasel. I also saw an adult black bear in the afternoon and noticed that the river is rising slowly.

June 18 The river crested last night and this morning the sun is shining. I am staying at Wadlin Lake and will for the next three days. The area around the lake has been burnt and it will be interesting to see what birds are around. Not a drop of rain today and so I birded around the campground area. ❑

— Jim Lange

BAILLIE BIRDATHON—1991

Alberta Bird Atlas Team

The Alberta Bird Atlas Project (ABAP) teamed up with the Beaverhill Bird Observatory (BBO) to make 1991 a debut year for the Long Point Bird Observatory's Bai-llie Birdathon in Alberta.

On all accounts the event was a success! Initial planning by both the ABAP and the BBO determined that while the atlas project would solicit pledges and participation through its mailing list, as well as pull together a birding team, the BBO would be responsible for the event's organization (read paperwork). I'm not sure who was responsible for the weather, but huge thank yous go out to Albert Brule (Executive Director of the ABAP) and Debra Belmonte (BBO Fundraising Director), who pulled off the event.

Although I haven't heard a full report from other birdathon groups as of yet, I do know the birding was terrific! The ABAP team – with guest birder Jim Lange (President, Edmonton Bird Club), myself, and six atlas trainees (Craig, Selena, Mike, Scott, Karen, Karen) – felt our day to be a fine outing. Highlights included a very close look at a parading bittern; migrating shorebirds including red knot, red phalarope, and white-rumped sandpiper; and a quick glance at white-winged and surf scoter.

The only disappointment of the day turned out to be the cancellation of the Pancake Breakfast due to poor road conditions.

All in all, it was truly exciting to see how many species can be seen at Beaverhill in the spring. Now, I eagerly await next year's Baillie Birdathon – when we will again be able to spend a perfect day out birding – all in the name of bird conservation and study. ❑

— Petra Stubbs

BLOCKBUSTER UPDATE—JULY

One of the greatest pleasures I've experienced with the Bird Atlas this summer, is travelling throughout the province to monitor our blockbusters (tough job, but someone has to do it!). What a diverse province Alberta is!

Early in June, I met up with Karen and Karen at Cold Lake and gleefully searched out all the beautiful warblers there. My first time that far east, I was surprised at the rolling hills and expanse of forest – perfect for numerous thrushes, warblers, and woodpeckers. Osprey and loons on the lake itself made our stay a heaven!

From Cold Lake, Karen and Karen worked their way south and were surprised at how fast the habitat changes. When I again caught up with them at Dillberry Lake Provincial Park they were beginning to record catbirds, thrashers, and curlews.

My next journey took me to the town of Nordegg, where Pat, Craig, and Selena were busy drying out their gear in a forestry bunkhouse. Heavy rains continued the following day. Birding wasn't great, although I was content with the morning's effort after sighting a townsend's solitaire, varied thrush and a feeding kingfisher. Earlier in the month, the team sighted a red-throated loon. Unfortunately, Craig got so excited he tripped on a log, fell in the lake and dislocated his shoulder. Thank goodness he recovered quickly!

A quick change from mountains to prairies, where Mike and Scott were happy to point out local species: My first sighting of a yellow-breasted chat! Returning north I made a stop at Slack Slough near Red Deer and stumbled upon the best pied-billed grebe waters in Alberta. At least three separate broods of fuzzy greblings swam out in full view!

Other teams – Boyd and Mike travelling through northern Alberta, and Bob Storms in the south – all report that despite the rain – all is going well.

We were also assigned two more SEED positions. On July 2, Laura Gretzinger and Tasha Greer started atlassing the Calling Lake area.

All in all, our 12 blockbusters enjoyed a successful summer – especially once the weather cleared a bit. As I sit here in my office, bogged down in neglected paperwork, I truly envy them. ❑

— Petra Stubbs

A REPORT BY KAREN ALDRED AND KAREN DUDLEY—BLOCKBUSTING TEAM

We spent our summer atlasing the area of Alberta from Lac La Biche a-cross to Cold Lake and down the Alberta Saskatchewan border to Compeer. During our travels, we passed through Boreal Forest, Aspen Parkland, and Prairie. In addition, some of these areas had been burned a few years ago and the vegetation was just starting to come back. As a result of such diverse habitats, we saw a wide variety of both bird and mammal life. It was fascinating to see so much of Alberta including the numerous small towns and their friend-ly inhabitants. It was however, a little depressing to see how much of the Lac La Biche forest is being cleared for what can only be marginal farming.

Some of the highlights of our summer are as follows:

- Finding a great-crested flycatcher on a nest, with young, north of where they are known to breed.
- Finding a great-horned owl with two fledglings in an old barn.
- Finding a pair of ferruginous hawks with two nestlings.
- Rescuing an injured great-horned owl with the help of Lac La Biche Fish and Wildlife.
- Watching cowbird nestlings being fed by smaller birds including yellow warblers, yellow-rumped warblers and song sparrows.
- Seeing our first white-winged crossbills and northern waterthrush.

One of the things we noticed was that many of the passerines were late this year. We didn't really start to see many of the warblers until late June. One recommendation for future blockbusters is to have a scope, as we found that most of the waterfowl and shorebirds were always on the opposite shore and as a result, almost impossible to identify.

All in all, it was a very educational and rewarding summer. We both now have close to 190 birds on our lists! ❑

BLOCKBUSTING TEAM #3

As the southern Alberta blockbusting team (the Prairie Dusters), we travelled approximately 15,000 km in order to atlas 5200 square kilometres of southern Alberta. Our region of interest was primarily prairie and cropland habitat, which was a somewhat different experience from the north's predominant tree cover.

The summers atlasing consisted of two runs through a sequence of squares. The first run (two days per square) was meant to delineate an area's species with the second run (one day per square) serving to advance the breeding status of birds previously seen.

Our first run began just south of Consort with squares scattered from there, south to Writing-On-Stone-Provincial Park (within five km of the Montana border). Our first days were somewhat slower paced than later in the summer as we were both new to identifying prairie species. Birds such as the horned lark, meadowlark, vesper sparrow, and all manner of blackbirds were to become very common place. Other birds always seemed to elicit more interest, such as the ferruginous hawk and turkey vulture (Writing-On-Stone).

Our first run had a few interesting moments in terms of weather. Light-

ning and thunder as well as slick wet impassable roads dogged us throughout the run up until early July.

We visited some very interesting places, not the least of which encompass Police Coulee in Writing-On-Stone, Cypress Hills, the swimming pool in Brooks and a small campground we found and claimed (New Brigden Camp). ❑

— Scott Millar & Michael Breauer

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

O.K. You've had a great summer, taken a last wistful look at the results from your atlas square and its birds, and have settled in for a leisurely winter. Except for the momentary excitement of that old stand-by, the Christmas Bird Count, it's all over until next spring, when you can go back to watching birds like you used to – as you walk the dog or go hiking or while on the opportunistic field trip to a park – just to see what's around.

Is that all there is? Well, I'm glad you've asked that question. Now that you are a seasoned and skilled bird surveyor, I'm going to tell you about something just a little bit exciting – something you can sink your teeth into. It's not that it's a secret, but until a birder develops him/her self to the point where this kind of birding seems achievable, it seems like too big a hurdle. What am I going on about? The Breeding Bird Survey, of course!

Most of you have probably vaguely heard about the Breeding Bird Survey, or the BBS as participants affectionately refer to this annual rite of birderhood. A good many of the regular Alberta BBS surveyors included their survey routes within atlas squares and contributed their data to the Breeding Bird Atlas database. And unlike other states/provinces where Atlases have been run, the BBS has expanded in Alberta all throughout the period of the atlas fieldwork. A minimum of 46 surveys were run in Alberta in 1991. This compares with five routes in 1968, the first year of the BBS in Alberta; and average of 27 routes per year from 1968 to 1987; and a previous high of 39 routes in 1981 (Park, J. 1988. Alberta Naturalist 18(2):53-58).

So it's obvious there is a lot of interest in the BBS already, but we have a very large province, many parts of which are uncovered or poorly covered at present. With the talent I know has been developed during the atlas field seasons, I am certain that some of the glaring holes in this regular monitoring program can be filled. No less important, the enthusiasm for organized birding activities that has been encouraged by the atlas cannot be allowed to flicker out, as a result of the vacuum that might occur after the Atlas is published.

Just what is involved in running a BBS route? Essentially the survey consists of a structured, annual, roadside count of all detectable birds on a single morning, in the peak of breeding period. It is beneficial if you can commit to doing the survey for a few years, since data are most reliable with a reg-ular observer. Of course, this is not a problem for most enthusiasts. The BBS is something that participants look forward to and plan for every year; it is intriguing to be able to reflect on the trends noticeable in **your** part of the birding world.

The survey is conducted by car, along a designated roadside route which allows a meaningful sample to be collected. This sample of bird records is used to represent the one degree block of latitude/longitude within which the route falls. Fifty stops are located along the 40 km route, with each stop separated by 0.8 km (half mile). Exactly three minutes of surveying is completed at each stop, thus the entire survey is expected to take no more than four and a half hours. All *detectable birds,* meaning that all of the individual birds whose song or call note can be detected, and all birds seen within 0.4 km (quarter mile) are recorded for the respective survey stops. In Alberta, the peak breeding period is sometime during June, or, in far northern Alberta, during the first part of July. The farther south one's route, the earlier the survey. It is preferable if routes are run at the same time every year.

Did I mention that the survey starts in early morning? Very early morning? Very, very early morning? Well I am afraid so, but once you get used to the idea, you appreciate the advantage of getting up to count birds when they are most vocal, starting at one-half hour before official sunrise. Depending on how far north your route is, the starting time can be from around 04:45 AM to 04:00 AM. This means that your survey is over by 08:30 AM to 09:30 AM.

The BBS is a very fast-paced and rigorous survey, which is made easier if you have an assistant along. However, once you are familiar with the techniques and route, it is quite feasible to run it alone – though less enjoyable. There is something about sharing the challenge of recording 15, 20 or more species at a single stop, within a three-minute time limit, and doing it carefully and accurately.

There is immense satisfaction of knowing that you are contributing to our knowledge of bird populations and their distribution. This is the end result of running a BBS route, something which relatively few birders undertake, but which many of our Alberta bird atlassers are capable of tackling.

Interested?

If you want to get more information, or would like to take part in a survey, contact:

The Provincial BBS Coordinator
Jack Park
10836 – 70 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T6A 2T4
(Phone 469-8127). ❑

— Dave Ealey

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